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ABSTRACT

Whereas testing is limited to the parameters of the instrument used, evaluation is a broader assessment of a situation. Wholistic evaluation amplifies the concept to include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Student-centered evaluation acknowledges that differentiated inputs may attribute to differentiated outputs. Select sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and educational variables unique to limited-English-proficient (LEP) students contribute to language acquisition and learning. Their recognition and integration into an evaluation plan facilitates appropriate and meaningful educational opportunities for LEP students. Teachers are both a valuable source of data and a resource to be used in student evaluation. Teacher expertise or connoisseurship is the backbone of instruction and needs to be built into the assessment model. If English as a second language and bilingual education teachers are considered key components in student evaluation, and reliable and valid information is obtainable through informal and formal means, educational decisions that affect LEP students will be more sound, realistic, and useful. (MSE)

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"Wholistic" Evaluation of Language Minority Students in Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Impact evaluation assesses the extent to which a program produces change in the desired direction in the target population (Rossi, Freeman, and Wright, 1979). It is utilization-focused when the findings directly effect rational decision-making (Patton, 1978). We, as English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education teachers, need to link program implementation with specified student outcomes. The outcomes discussed in this paper center on data available from language minority student characteristics, elementary and secondary assessment measures, and teachers.

"Wholistic" evaluation, as the term implies, is a totalistic approach. Its totality is derived from an amalgamation of linguistics and the applied, interrelated fields of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, second language acquisition, and second language testing. Each of these disciplines has contributed to the identification of significant factors that impact limited English proficient (LEP) student performance. What is necessary, at this point in time, is a framework that captures these variables and presents them in a logical way.

This paper addresses the issues surrounding the assessment of LEP students from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. It has four subsections: 1. theoretical considerations; 2. second language assessment procedures; 3. student centered evaluation; and 4. a model for second language assessment and achievement. Parts 1 and 2 report the current state of the art in the literature; Part 3 discusses the educational implications of the research; and Part 4 describes an assessment model based on student and teacher evaluation.

Theoretical Considerations

In recent years, language proficiency as a single linguistic notion of grammatical competence has expanded to include sociocultural, psychological, and paralinguistic dimensions. The emergence of this multiple trait construct known as communicative competence is attributed, in part, to the rejection of the 1950's structuralist conception of language. The initial criticism of structuralism centered on its inadequacy to account for the complexity of language, its inability to tap creative language construction, and its inability to recognize two levels of language, one underlying the other (Chomsky, 1965). Later, objection to the Chomskyan view was based on its failure to explain the communicative functions of language (Halliday, 1973) and its disregard for the sociocultural and psychoLinguistic aspects of language interaction (Hymes, 1971).

Today, competency of form (grammar) is recognized as part of the same developmental scheme as competency of function (use). Underlying linguistic knowledge is subject to the application of appropriateness

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and acceptability and thus is integrated into communicative competence. These theoretical precepts form the foundation for subsequent model building.

Many of the models offered in the literature uphold the divisible hypothesis of second language ability; that is, each of the defined components represents an autonomous factor contributing to overall language proficiency. Hernandez-Chavez, Burt, and Dulay (1978) have devised a three dimensional matrix of 64 independently measurable cells. Similarly, Noa, Silverman, and Russell (1976) depict language proficiency as a cubic representation of three domains, each subdivided into four facets. Canale and Swain's (1980) model identifies three major features of communicative competence.

In a construct validation study of Canale and Swain's hypothesized model, Bachman and Palmer (1982) examine the three proposed components of communicative competence. Using a multitrait-multimethod design, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competencies were tested on adult, non-native English speakers, with four varied measures. The results yielded a revised model of one general and two specific traits.

The evidence of the presence of a general factor across all measures lends support to the unitary hypothesis of second language ability. This alternate, rival hypothesis proposes the existence of indivisible rather than divisible competence. In Language in Education: Testing the Tests (1978), Oller, Stump, Striff, Gunnarson, and Perkins report studies that indicate test performance is primarily dependent on global language proficiency. Oller and Hinofotis (1976; 1980) further elaborate that for adult second language learners, the g-factor of intelligence is indistinguishable from communicative competence, the ability to use a language.

Cummins (1980) recognizes Oller's position that there is a single language proficiency factor directly correlated with IQ and academic achievement, however, this factor does not account for those manifestations of language exhibited in informal, social settings. In the theoretical framework that Cummins offers, communicative proficiency is conceptualized along two perpendicular continuums (1981;1983). The first, range of contextual support, is expressed at one extreme as context-embedded, face-to-face communication situations and, at the other end, as context reduced communication. Whereas in context-embedded situations, the negotiation of meaning is achieved through interpersonal interaction, in context-reduced communication, the paralinguistic and pragmatic support systems have been removed. The second continuum relates the developmental degree of cognitive involvement in communicative activities, from undemanding to demanding.

The usefulness of the current theories of communicative competence in explaining the nature of language proficiency of LEP students has been questioned. In fact, in this review of the research literature, it becomes obvious that the definition of language proficiency and/or communicative competence is elusive at best. However, if ESL and bilingual education teachers are responsible for the evaluation of their students, they must be cognizant of the role theory plays in the development of teaching methodologies and assessment instruments.

Linguistic theory provides us with perspectives and viewpoints which, in turn, lead to the formulation of new instructional strategies and specific rationales for testing. A particular conceptualization of what constitutes language proficiency not only influences measurement,

but subsequently, determines the kinds of treatment given to students (Genesee, 1984).

Second Language Assessment Procedures

Historically, linguistic theory has influenced second language assessment (Carroll, 1953; Davies, 1968; Upshur, 1973). This notion is evident in Spolsky's (1978) classification scheme which identifies three overlapping, yet distinct, periods of second language testing: 1. prescientific; 2. psychometric-structuralistic; and 3. integrative-sociolinguistic. Each trend has contributed to the development of distinct procedures for evaluating LEP students.

During the prescientific period, evaluation of language skills was dependent on the expertise of the teacher. Language testing was confined to paper and pencil tasks (e.g. translation); oral examination was considered the exception. Rating was subjective with no defined criteria on which to base judgment. The intuition of the teacher was the primary source of impressionistic evaluation data (Madsen, 1983).

The psychometric-structuralistic trend, emerging in the 1950's, was marked by the joint contribution of behavioral psychologists and structural linguists. Both language and measurement were brought under scientific scrutiny. The demand for objectivity, precision, and control was met by statistical techniques, assuring test reliability and validity.

The insistence upon measuring direct, observable behavior stemmed from the theory that language learning was a habit formation process (Lado, 1961). The identification of isolated, atomistic features of language (phomenes, morphemes, lexemes) lent itself to the creation of objective, discrete-point tests. The advantage of discrete-point measures rest in their capacity to provide diagnostic information and to their ease and reliability in administration and in scoring. Their usefulness in a classroom setting is also noteworthy, where mastery of specified curricular content is an instructional goal (Groot, 1975; Morrow, 1979).

Discrete-point language measures specify in detail a student's mastery of a particular aspect of linguistics (Levine, 1976). Their traditional focus on grammatical or linguistic competence has been criticized for spontaneous response, and for their linguistically constrained format (Oller, 1976; Morrow, 1979). Nevertheless, in ESL and bilingual education instructional settings, structuralistic language testing techniques remain the most widely used (Day, 1981).

The integrative-sociolinguistic trend, dating from the 1960's, is characterized by the view of psycholinguists that language testing should be approached wholistically in conjunction with the sociolinguists belief in a strong functional dimension. The integrative approach centers on the total communication effect of an utterance (Carroll, 1961), rather than an isolated speech act. It encompasses the adaptation of linguistic or grammatical competence to the informational input of the situation (Savignon, 1972).

The purpose of integrative language tests is to evaluate the use of natural language in social/cultural interaction. These measures are generally categorized as one of three subtypes: 1. direct; face-to-face interactive exchange between two or more persons; 2.

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semi-direct; use of a mechanical elicitation device to prompt active speech (e.g. tape recorder); 3. indirect; absence of active speech production on the part of the student (Clark, 1979). The direct and semi-direct approaches offer the greatest face validity, as they most accurately simulate real life communication. The pragmatic or indirect approach is considered the most reliable, producing high intercorrelations among its varied techniques such as cloze, dictation, and noise (Oller and Conrad, 1971; Oller, 1972; Johanson, 1972).

A new method of language measurement has evolved in the last decade which combines the most advantageous features of discrete-point and of integrative testing. This quasi-integrative (McCollum and Day, 1981) or mixed (Gottlieb, 1983) procedure couples the use of spontaneous language sampling, through direct or semi-direct means, with an objective scoring system. Provision for a wide range of acceptable responses allows for the creative manipulation of language, maintaining the integrity of current linguistic theory. The discrete-point based scoring system, being structured and uniform, lends to ease of interpretation and test reliability.

Another relatively new evaluation procedure for LEP students integrates discrete-point and integrative testing to form a dual purpose, two-tiered instrument. The first layer is designed to establish the comparability between groups with varying communicative needs while the second layer assesses specific content area skills. The multiple methods required for this integrated approach have been suggested for communicative competence testing in conjunction with academic achievement testing (Groot, 1975; Walters, 1979; Carroll, 1980; Keller, 1982).

The current state of the art in second language testing is summarized in the following diagram. In it, the assessment procedures described in this section are presented along a continuum, from the most linguistically restrictive to the least linguistically restrictive design. From a chronological perspective, discrete-point tests, on the extreme left, were the first to be developed followed by integrative measures on the extreme right. Mixed and two-tiered instruments, occupying the middle sectors, represent the most recently devised second language assessment tools.

Student Centered Evaluation

So far, this paper has attended to linguistic theory and its application to second language assessment. The focus now shifts to the input phase of evaluation. Differential inputs might include the effects of instruction and the classroom environment, the teacher, and the student (Tucker, 1979). This section identifies these input variables within the context of evaluation.

One of the goals of ESL and transitional bilingual education programs is to produce students who have subconsciously acquired second language (L2) communicative skills, and who have consciously learned curriculum content (Krashen, 1982). Teaching methodologies that provide comprehensible input and maintain a low level of student anxiety such as total physical response (Asher, 1982) and the natural approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) have been commended for facilitating the language acquisition process.

Other factors that may affect LEP student performance associated

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with teaching are more psycholinguistic in nature. The student's motivation, attitudes, self-concept, cognitive learning style, personality are some traits that should be considered by teachers in both instruction and in evaluation. As a practical tool, ancillary to teaching, testing needs to mirror the identical goals and objectives.

Teachers, themselves, are important sources of input in the evaluation process (Harris, 1969; Rivera and Simich, 1981). Teacher judgment should not be underestimated (Freytes and Rivera, 1979), for the observational measurement techniques which teachers employ are critical adjuncts to the more conventional and formal methods of assessment. According to Vernon (1960), ranking lists produced by teachers, who know their students well, probably constitute the most valid criterion available. Pedulla et al. (1980) suggest that teacher ratings and standardized test results of students are directly related.

Student characteristics also influence student performance (Farhady, 1982); therefore, it is advisable to include learned variables in evaluation. For LEP students, many of these factors are sociolinguistically grounded; e.g. role models, access to L2 outside the school domain, language of interaction in informal and formal settings, and use of code switching. Others can be categorized as educational or experiential such as years of schooling in the United States and outside the continental U.S., years of residence in the U.S., and level of literacy in L1 and L2. The final cluster of variables that warrant consideration in the assessment of LEP students might include sex, age/grade, birthplace, and socio/cultural/economic background.

In the evaluation of LEP students, there are multiple sources of input data, of testing methods, and of measured outcomes. The reliance on a limited number of variables results in insufficient and incomplete information on which to base educational decisions. "Wholistic" evaluation contextualizes assessment, broadening its scope and enhancing criteria selection. Figure 2, below, presents the three phases of the evaluation cycle for LEP students.

Development of an Assessment Model

The evaluation cycle identifies inputs (factors outside of test materials), processes (testing methods), and outputs (student outcomes). It is useful to the classroom teacher in planning, implementing, and modifying curriculum objectives to meet the needs of the students. At the point of exit from an ESL/bilingual program, the outputs of LEP students ought to be comparable to those of their native English- speaking peers. Predictive validation studies, however, on successful transition of language minority students into L2 only classrooms are practically non-existent (Curtis, Ligon, and Weibly, 1980).

The formulation of a framework is a first step in the development of theoretically and empirically viable entry and exit procedures (Cummins, 1984). The model, presented below, attempts to capture the critical areas in the assessment of LEP students. Supplemented with standardized testing instruments, it portrays a "wholistic" picture of the students' competencies. Although this paper has centered on L2 outcomes, this model is both relevant and applicable to L1 evaluation.

The proposed assessment model considers four areas in the evaluation of LEP students: 1. the experiential background of the student; 2. the level of acquisition; 3. the degree of conceptual learning; and 4. the teacher's estimation of the student's competencies. Experiential background is further defined by the sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and educational factors that affect the language acquisition/learning process. Language acquisition encompasses the development of both receptive and expressive communicative proficiency appropriate for meaningful participation in the school milieu. Conceptual learning designates subject matter knowledge and its relation to literacy. The fourth component, teacher evaluation, provides on-going feedback to students both in informal and formal contexts.

The arrows give some directionality to the components and the subcomponents of the model; they do not imply any causal relationships. It is a logical presumption to expect that prior experiences of LEP students will influence their ability to acquire language and to learn concepts. Teacher evaluation is a natural outgrowth of instruction and should be used to monitor the rate of acquisition/learning and to modify teaching objectives.

Conclusion

Testing is a measurement of a sample behavior; evaluation is the assignment of a meaningful value. Whereas testing is limited to the parameters of the instrument, evaluation is a broader assessment of a situation. "Wholistic" evaluation amplifies the concept to include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

Linguistic theory provides us with definitions of language and hypothesized models to empirically test them. Moreover, linguistic theory is a backdrop for the development of teaching methodologies and language assessment tools. The intent of testing instruments for second language learners has traditionally been to measure language and not until recently has it broadened to include a measure of academic achievement.

Student centered evaluation acknowledges that differentiated inputs may attribute to differentiated outputs. Select sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and educational variables unique to LEP students, contribute to language acquisition and learning. Their recognition and integration into an evaluation plan facilitates appropriate and meaningful educational opportunities for LEP students.

Finally, teachers are both a valuable source of data and a resource to be utilized in student evaluation. Teacher expertise or connoisseurship (Eisner, 1978) is the backbone of instruction and needs to be built into the assessment model. If ESL and bilingual education teachers are considered key components in student evaluation, and reliable and valid information is obtainable through informal and formal means, then educational decisions that affect LEP students will be more sound, realistic, and useful.

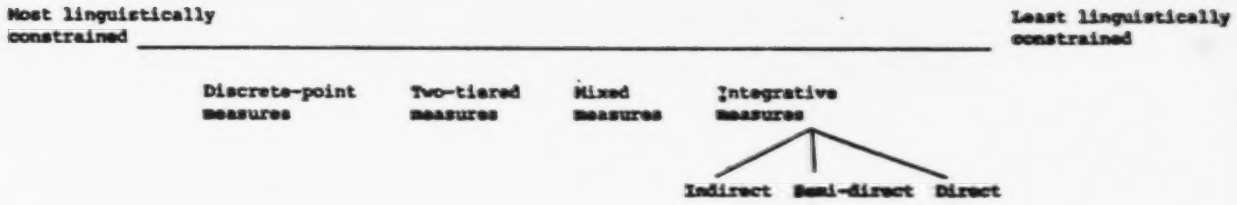

Figure 1. Continuum of second language assessment measures.

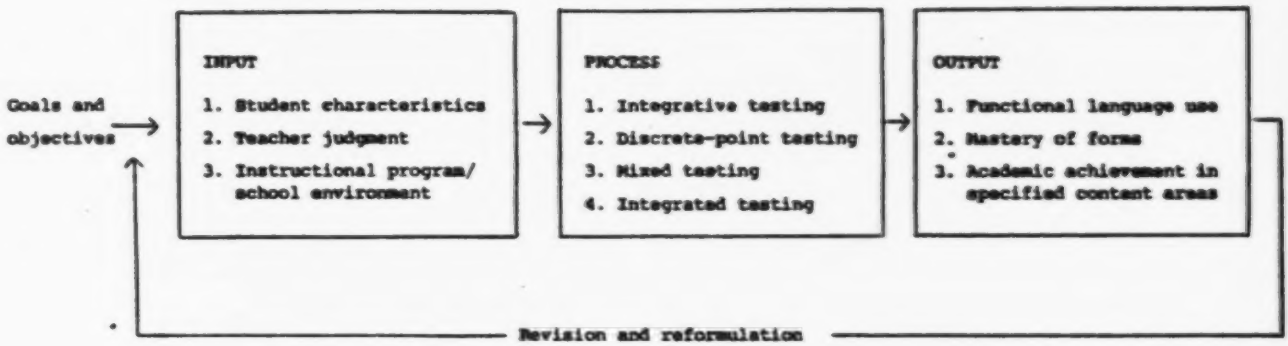

Figure 2. The evaluation cycle for limited English proficient students.

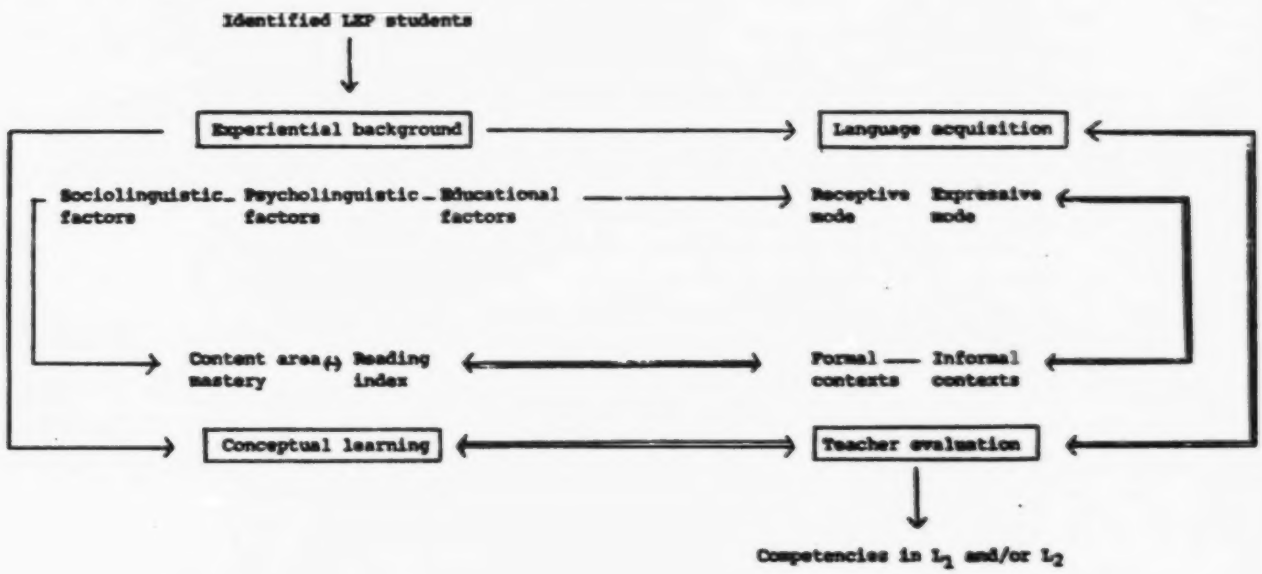

Figure 3. An assessment model for LEP students.

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